in Lawngtlai district. These are occasional immigrants from Bangladesh, especially during the paddy season.

These are no reports of occurrence of elephants in recent years from Aizawl, Serchhip, Kolasib and Champhai district.

From the above account, it seems that the total number of elephants in Mizoram is only 14, with some seasonal migrants from Bangladesh. Their chances of long-term survival in the wild in Mizoram are bleak, as the existing herds are not only very small, but also severely fragmented, with no possibility of contiguity.

Habitat destruction and poaching continue to be major threats. The decrease of population in Ngengpui (from 10 in 1993 to 8 in 1997) indicates unreported poaching. Protection measures in Dampa and Ngengpui should be strengthened. Part of Dampa is now virtually out of bounds due to insurgency by the Bru (Reang) militants. Palak Dil and adjacent forests (about 40 sq. km) should be declared as a wildlife sanctuary (it is also the largest lake in Mizoram). To avoid inbreeding and maintain genetic quality, translocation of one or two elephants from Assam (where troublesome elephants are occasionally captured) or Meghalaya to Dampa and Ngengpui could have solved the problem, but the prevailing situation makes it unlikely in the near future. With better protection, Dampa and Ngengpui could support larger populations. Conservation education among the local villagers, with the help of NGOs, is also strongly recommended.

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6. ON LITTLE GREBES *TACHYBAPTUS RUFICOLLIS* BREEDING NEAR K. KARUNANIDHI NAGAR, TIRUCHIRAPALLI, TAMIL NADU

Little grebes *Podiceps* (=*Tachybaptus*) *ruficollis* were common around Trichinopoly in the 1930s. One Mr. C. McConway had collected over one hundred eggs, and washed them (with Vim and Monkey brand soap) to find out whether the brown coloration on the eggs was original or acquired. He reported that the coloration was no indication of incubation stage (Baker & Inglis 1930. THE BIRDS OF SOUTHERN INDIA, p. 485). Sixty to seventy years later, they are still common, despite the developmental changes in their habitat. At the onset of the southwest monsoon, when the ruddy brown earth is carried into ponds by rainwater and settles at the bottom, the pond water becomes clear. Little grebes arrive noiselessly during cloudy afternoons in hundreds, and run on this clear water surface, beating their wings. They stay on, breed and leave in mid-January. The three main water bodies frequented by the little grebes are Vadugapatty Periakulam,

TABLE 1
TEN YEAR COUNTS OF LITTLE GREBE POPULATION AND NESTS

Year/Month	Population Size	Year/Month	No. of Nests
1. 1989 July	150+		No count
2. 1990 August	280+		"
3. 1991 August	210+		"
4. 1992 July	180+	1992/September	68
5. 1993 August	250+	1993/September	116
6. 1994 August	330+	1994/September	128
7. 1995	No arrivals		
8. 1996	"		
9. 1997 July	300+	1997/October	108
10. 1998 July	300+	1998/October	126

Senkulam and Sathanur Kulam. The total water spread of the three tanks is 8.2 sq. km with 1.4 sq. km sheltered bush margins. My counts of birds and nests during the last 10 years are given in Table 1.

One pair of little grebe had built their nest in a well 3 m in diameter, close to Olaiyur railway crossing, adjoining the irrigation canal. The water level of the well would rise and fall, depending on the level of the canal water. Though the floating nest of the grebes was first found accidentally in September 1995, I checked and saw the nests each year. One nesting a year was observed in the southwest monsoon.

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7. IRIS COLORATION IN THE LARGE EGRET *CASMERODIUS ALBUS* AND MEDIAN EGRET *MESOPHOYX INTERMEDIA* (FAMILY ARDEIDAE)

The Simpson Industrial Estate, Sembium, in the northern part of Chennai (Madras), is a well-known heronry in Tamil Nadu, India. Species that breed in the confines of the Estate are the large egret *Casmerodius albus*, median egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*, little egret *Egretta garzetta*, black-crowned night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* and Indian shag *P. fuscicollis*.

Ali and Ripley (1987) mentioned the coloration of the iris of the median egret as lemon-yellow, and that of the large egret as yellow for race *alba* and bright lemon-yellow for *modesta*. Roberts (1991) stated it as yellow in the median egret, but did not describe the colour of the iris in large egret. Brown *et al.* (1982) described it as ruby for the median (race: *brachyrhyncha*) and brilliant red for the large egret (race: *melanorhynchos*).

During 1996-97, about 50 pairs of large egrets bred in Simpson Estate. In the early part of the breeding season in November, the birds sported black bills, flesh coloured tibia, orbital skin ranging from bright yellowish-green through bright bluish-green to dark bluish-green. The colour of the iris was yellow in all the birds. By January 4, 1997, the bills of the birds had started yellowing at the base, the colour of the orbital patch and tibia regressed. During this period, one of the birds of a pair was recorded to have a red iris. However, the iris reverted to yellow again after three weeks.

In mid-February, most of the birds were feeding chicks in various stages of growth.